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# Questions and Answers About Workfare

This booklet is for people who are taking part in a food stamp workfare demonstration project. For more information, ask the workfare staff or your food stamp office.

**Q** WHAT IS A FOOD STAMP  
WORKFARE DEMONSTRATION  
PROJECT?

**A** The U.S. Congress has told the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Labor to conduct food stamp workfare projects in a number of places around the country. These projects test the idea of having certain food stamp participants perform work in exchange for food stamps. Instead of receiving a salary or wages for this work, these persons are "paid" with the food stamps their households would normally receive. They do not receive any extra food stamps for taking part in workfare.

Political jurisdictions such as counties and cities sponsor these projects locally, with the cooperation of local food stamp offices. The projects will last about 1 year and they are being studied carefully to find out how well they work. If you take part in workfare, you may be asked what you think of it. After the projects are over, a report will be sent to Congress describing the results.

**Q** HOW DOES WORKFARE WORK?

**A** The food stamp office will determine if your household must take part in workfare. They will send the name of the person in your household who will perform the work to the workfare sponsor.

The workfare staff will interview you and tell you when and where you should report for your work assignment. They will also tell the food stamp office whether or not you completed your work assignment. If you do not meet your workfare obligation and do not have good cause, you will be disqualified from the food stamp program. Your household will not get food stamps for you.

**Q** WHICH HOUSEHOLDS  
PARTICIPATE IN WORKFARE?

**A** With some exceptions, all able-bodied people between the ages of 18 and 60 who are not employed full time must register for work and accept an offer of suitable employment in order to get food stamps. Under workfare rules, food stamp households must take part in workfare if:

- they contain people who are registered for work, and
- those people do not find a job within 30 days after registering for work, and
- the household's food stamp allotment is worth more than its monthly earned income.

**Q** DOES EVERYONE IN THE  
HOUSEHOLD HAVE TO TAKE  
A WORKFARE JOB?

**A** Only one work registrant from each workfare household must work. If more than one person in your household is registered for work, your household can decide who will take the workfare job. If people in your household want to share the workfare job, let the food stamp office know. It may be possible to share the work.

Households in which no one has to register for work do not have to take part in workfare.

If someone in your household is registered for work, but your household's monthly earned income is more than the value of its monthly food stamp benefits, your household does not have to take part in workfare. For example, if your household's total earned income is \$130 a month, but its food stamp benefits are worth \$100 a month, no one in your household has to take a workfare job.

**Q** WHAT ARE YOUR  
RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER  
WORKFARE?

**A** You must:

- Report to the workfare sponsor for job scheduling when asked.
- Report to workfare jobs.
- Complete the number of hours of work assigned.
- Tell the workfare sponsor or food stamp office if you cannot get to an interview or to a workfare job.



**Q** IF YOU HAVE A WORKFARE JOB, DO YOU STILL HAVE TO LOOK FOR REGULAR, PAYING JOB?

**A** Yes. Your first responsibility is to find a regular job. If your workfare job keeps you from going to a job interview or working at a regular part-time job, tell the workfare staff right away, so they can reschedule your workfare activity.

Also, if you find a regular paying job, tell the food stamp office. The regular job may reduce or cancel your workfare obligation.

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**Q** HOW MANY HOURS WILL YOU HAVE TO WORK?

**A** The food stamp office will figure out how many workfare hours you owe each month by:

- subtracting your household's earned income from the value of its food stamp allotment, and
- dividing the difference by the Federal minimum wage, which is now \$2.90 per hour. (Fractions of hours are dropped.)

Example: If your household receives \$100 in food stamps and earns \$40 a month, the difference is \$60. Sixty dollars divided by \$2.90 gives you 20 hours, dropping the fraction of an hour.

You will never have to work more than 40 hours a week, including any hours you work at a regular paying job. Most households will owe an average of 2 to 5 days of work per month.

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**Q** WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S EARNED INCOME GOES UP?

**A** The more income your household earns, the fewer workfare hours it will owe. When your household's earned income is more than its monthly food stamp allotment, it will not have to take part in workfare.

Under food stamp rules, you only have to report increases of \$25 or more in your household's monthly income. However, you may wish to report smaller increases, since they will reduce the number of workfare hours you owe.

**Q** HOW MANY WORKFARE HOURS  
WILL YOU ACTUALLY WORK?

**A** The number of workfare hours you work may actually be less than the number of hours you owe, depending on such factors as the number and kind of workfare assignments available. Hours that you owe but are not asked to work are not carried forward to your workfare obligation for the next month.

**Q** WHEN WILL THE WORKFARE  
STAFF CONTACT YOU ABOUT  
A WORKFARE JOB?

**A** To be certified for food stamps, you must register for work. If you do not find a job within 30 days from the day you register for work, the workfare staff will contact you about workfare job scheduling.

**Q** WHAT KIND OF WORKFARE  
JOBS WILL YOU DO?

**A** The kinds of jobs available depend on where the workfare staff has been able to develop workfare jobs. By law, these jobs are entry-level, trainee-type positions with public service and nonprofit employers.

To figure out what kind of job to give you, the workfare staff will probably ask you how long you have been unemployed or employed part time, what kinds of work you have done, what kinds of jobs you can do, and if you have transportation.

**Q** DO YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT  
ANY WORKFARE JOB?

**A** You cannot be told to work in a job:

- which does not give you working conditions as good as those for other employees doing the same kind of work.
- which is vacant because of a hiring freeze.
- which threatens your health and safety (under Section 2(a)(3) of Public Law 88-286 relating to occupational health and safety conditions).
- which is not an entry level position (with some exceptions).
- where a paid employee was fired so that you could do the job at no cost to the employer.

If you are told to work under any of these conditions you should refuse. Such assignments are illegal. You should also immediately tell your food stamp office.

**Q** WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY  
JOB BENEFITS?

**A** The law says you will be given benefits equal to those normally given by the employer to individuals "similarly employed." If your workfare job requires you to do the same work as other employees where you work, and you work a similar number of hours, then you may be entitled to some of the same benefits as those employees. However, very few employers provide benefits to people working only a few days a month.

Some project sites will pay for your transportation to the job site. If you need such help, ask if it is available. If you can't pay for transportation and the employer does not provide it, talk to the workfare staff. They may be able to place you in a job closer to your home.

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**Q** IF YOU CANNOT REPORT  
FOR JOB SCHEDULING OR  
A WORKFARE ASSIGNMENT,  
WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

**A** Contact the workfare staff at once. If they think you have good cause for not reporting, they will try to reschedule you. If they do not think you have good cause, they will tell the food stamp office you have not met workfare requirements and the food stamp office will take steps to disqualify you.



**Q** WHAT ARE GOOD CAUSE  
REASONS FOR NOT MEETING  
ALL WORKFARE RULES?

**A** Good cause reasons are circumstances beyond your control. For example:

- You are ill.
- Another person in your household is ill and needs your help.
- You have a household emergency.
- You don't have public or private transportation.
- You don't have money to pay for transportation and the sponsor does not provide it.

You also have good cause if:

- You become exempt from the food stamp work registration requirements.
- Your household's earned income is more than its food stamp allotment.
- You move out of the area which is participating in the workfare project.
- Your paid job conflicts with your workfare assignment.
- A job interview scheduled by the Employment Service conflicts with your workfare assignment.
- Commuting time is more than 2 hours a day.

**Q** WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU  
DO NOT MEET WORKFARE  
RULES?

**A** If you do not report for job scheduling, do not accept a workfare job, or do not complete your workfare obligation, and you do not have good cause, you will be disqualified from the food stamp program for one month. Before you are disqualified, you will receive a Notice of Adverse Action. You have the right to appeal your disqualification through a food stamp fair hearing.



**Q** WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU ARE DISQUALIFIED?

**A** If you are disqualified, your household will not receive food stamp benefits for you that month. Instead, if they are still certified, they will receive food stamps only for themselves. They may also be entitled to some extra food stamps for any workfare hours you did complete.

If someone else in your household is registered for work, and your household's earned income is less than its food stamp allotment during the month you are disqualified, that person must fulfill a workfare obligation.

**Q** WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY BY THE WORKFARE SPONSOR?

**A** The first thing you should do is talk with the workfare sponsor. The sponsor has a responsibility to resolve grievances. If the sponsor can't solve the problem, talk with the food stamp office. If your problem is still unresolved, you may want to file a complaint.

If you are going to be disqualified from the food stamp program and think you should not be, you should ask for a fair hearing. The fair hearing official will decide whether you are right or not.

**Q** HOW DO YOU FILE A COMPLAINT?

**A** To file a complaint, put it in writing and give it to the food stamp office, which will forward it to the Departments of Agriculture and Labor for appropriate action.

You can also write directly to:

The USDA/DOL Workfare Advisory Committee  
c/o Ms. Claire Lipsman, Director  
Program Development Division - Rm. 658 GHI  
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA  
500 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Food Stamp Program is available to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, age, political beliefs, or handicap.

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